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**ABSTRACT**

To examine the impact of Camp Limberlost, a two-week residential camp for socially and economically disadvantaged children, various methods were used to obtain evaluation data in the form of parental feedback on the 1982 and 1983 camps. The four research objectives were (1) to identify changes in children resulting from the camp experience, (2) to involve the parent in the assessment of the child's experience, (3) to identify areas for improvement in camp management and operation, and (4) to determine the effectiveness of the various techniques of data collection. It was found that parental feedback was of most use in evaluating the camp's effects. Data were collected by means of post card surveys and home interviews. The results of both 1982 and 1983 surveys were highly positive. Home interviews in 1982 were not very supportive, perhaps because of time lapse and inadequacies of the interview instrument; however, more extensive and positive results were obtained from 1983 interviews. Study recommendations include the use of multiple sources for data to compare results, collection of information on camper activity preferences, and planning of brief interviews. Appended charts and tables describe camper characteristics, preferences, perceptions, and parental feedback. (MM)

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PARENTAL FEEDBACK IN THE EVALUATION OF A CAMP FOR DISADVANTAGED  
CHILDREN: THE CAMP LIMBERLOST PROJECT

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The cooperation of parents and campers was quite instrumental toward the success of the 1982 and 1983 endeavors. Myra Munds, graduate student, assisted with the construction of the survey instruments and home visitations utilized in the 1982 survey.

Ron Knisley, Program Director, assisted with home visitations during the 1983 research. The following graduate students likewise assisted with the 1983 home interviews: Larry Anthon, Craig Clynes, Frank McCann and Gregg McElroy. The entire 1982 Camp staff was helpful in collecting data regarding camper behavior during Camp.

## THE CAMP LIMBERLOST PROJECT

It is worthwhile pointing out that camp research can be a valuable and cooperative activity for both camp directors and educators. For educators, applied research in camping can be personally rewarding and make a meaningful contribution to a general body of knowledge. Involvement is encouraged and appreciated as camp directors discuss their research ideas with members of the academic community. Universities have access to various resources that can make research more efficient, but camp directors will need to determine the research activity that is most timely for their camp and develop a tentative plan to implement the activities. In conducting this research we have combined the roles of camp managers, educators, and researchers, and we believe that the work is enriched by this cooperation.

The initial intent of the research described here was to examine the impact of a two-week residential camp for disadvantaged children. In this process, something was also learned about the methods used in collecting evaluation data. In this report, various methods of obtaining feedback from the parents of campers are compared and their implications for evaluating Camp services discussed.

### Camp Limberlost

Camp Limberlost is a 54-year old resident camp for boys and girls ages 8, 9 and 10. The Camp is financed by the Bloomington Kiwanis and managed by Illinois State University. The Kiwanis sponsor annual fund raisers that provide money for all operating costs. Daily maintenance and capital improvement are not budgeted items since the Camp site is leased from a private camp corporation each year.

The University provides the staff, equipment and supplies to conduct the 2-week resident experience. Counselors are recruited among college students with majors in recreation, social work, physical education and elementary education, among others. One-half of the counselors' tuition and fees for the 3-credit hour course are paid by the Kiwanis. Volunteers serve as support staff at Camp.

Counselors-in-training are recruited from previous campers once they become 16 years of age. Corporation staff assist with meals, maintenance, waterfront and health services.

Children are referred to the Camp through the local school districts. They are disadvantaged in that they reside within socially and economically deprived neighborhoods. Most campers are lacking in social growth and development and behavioral maturity. Additionally, most children live within "troubled homes." Family incomes are typically low and many of the campers participate in the public school food programs that provide meals at reduced costs. Many of their households are managed by a single parent or guardian who is usually the mother or close relative. Many parents and guardians have various health problems, and approximately one-fourth of all campers arrive at Camp with prescribed medication.

The campers at Limberlost have displayed a few common characteristics over the years. Some campers seek out the opportunity for solitude. This may be important to the child that needs time to think through personal problems that stem from the home environment. In contrast, many campers are quite anxious to assume a social role at Camp upon their arrival. Often their social interaction necessitates close supervision and effective counseling.

The purposes of Camp Limberlost are presented as "fun, food and freedom". An atmosphere centering around laughter and happiness provides the basis for having fun. Three balanced meals are provided each day. Menus are carefully planned for nutritional balance and reviewed prior to sitting down to a "family style" meal. Children are permitted a great deal of flexibility during the daily schedule. The Camp provides 12-15 various activities scheduled within 5 activity periods each day. The campers are free to select their activities. Some may choose to leave an activity in progress and join another activity group.

The Camp objectives are: sociability, responsibility, and appreciation. Sociability, as defined in this research, is the ability to associate with others

and seek friends. Campers are carefully observed as they interact with other campers and given guidance in the development of social skills. Closely aligned with sociability is the second objective: responsibility. Campers are held responsible for their social behavior with Camp staff and other campers. Camp staff are continually discussing behavioral problems with campers. Likewise, campers are completely responsible for all decisions they make during the course of the day. This includes an explanation of their location during activity times and general Camp programs such as leisure time and rest time. An appreciation for the "out-of-doors" (natural flora and fauna) is stressed at Camp. For example, living organisms remain in their natural habitat, not in a camper's shirt pocket or suit case at the end of Camp. An appreciation for others' opinions and possessions is regularly discussed with each camper.

#### General Research Activity

The Camp Limberlost Project was undertaken for various reasons. The four research objectives were:

- identify changes in campers as a result of the Camp experience.
- involve the parent/guardian in the direct assessment of the child's experience.
- identify areas in which the management and operation of the Camp could become more effective.
- determine the effectiveness of the various techniques of data collection.

Multiple research activities were undertaken with the 1982 and 1983 campers. In Charts 1 and 2, the various research activities for the two years are outlined. Table 1 indicates the total camp populations by sex and camp year. The distribution of male and female campers did not vary a great deal between the 1982 and 1983 Camps.

The main data presented here concern the parents' evaluation of the Camp.

Activity preferences of the campers were collected for the purpose of assessing needs. The information collected from the campers themselves in 1982 provided an interesting portrait of the children that year and seemed to typify the Camp's clientele.

The campers' self-reports on activities in which they participated prior to Camp are summarized in Table 2. Female campers were much more involved in music (83.3%) and dance (66.7%) when compared to the male campers (53.1% and 34.7%, respectively). Riflery was not as popular with the female campers (36.7%, particularly when compared to males (83.7%).

A comparison of camper activity involvement prior to Camp with camper activity preference during Camp (Table 3) provided interesting results. Generally, female campers were less inhibited towards participation in riflery at Camp; male campers displayed less inhibition toward dance and no increased interest in music.

Campers were also asked about interest in general Camp programs. It may be noted that only 63.3% of male campers were interested in attending outside worship activity (Table 4). Furthermore, upon completing Camp, only small majorities reported feeling more needed and wanted (63.2%) or that they would be doing more by themselves (67.1%). However, the Camp experience was perceived generally quite highly by the campers (Table 5).

In the most extensive aspect of the two year research activity, counselors were asked to monitor the daily behavior of each camper in their cabins. The survey sheets were completed by the counselors following each evening program. The results indicated very little change from "day-to-day" in the campers' behavior. Perhaps a daily evaluation does not yield enough time between evaluations. Therefore, the counselors could not be appropriately discriminatory concerning behaviors of campers.

#### Parental Feedback

Ultimately the feedback from the parents proved the most useful in evaluating

the camp's effects. Data from three sources will be reviewed: the post card surveys, the 1982 home interviews and the 1983 home interviews.

The Post Card Survey. The Post Card survey was designed to provide input from a large number of parents and a generalized measure of their perceptions. In effect, these answered how well the camp did its job. Some problems were anticipated regarding the return rate and the ability to receive usable responses. To meet these ends a survey technique was developed which included: (a) a set of questions covering a small number of general but significant aspects of the camp presented in a Likert-scale format, (b) the use of a self-addressed stamped postcard for returning the responses, and (c) a cover letter to the parents explaining the survey. The cover letter was brief, emphasized the concern of the camps' managers to improve services, and was signed by the Director and Assistant Director. The actual survey consisted of statements regarding the camp's impact on the child. These were all phrased positively and responses were registered on a four point Likert-scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The Post Card survey was used for both the 1982 and 1983 groups. Both surveys contained items regarding the overall quality of experience, exposure to new activities, social relations, interest in nature and reflections on Camp. The 1983 group also responded to an item regarding increased independence.

1982 Home Interviews. More specific information about the Camp's effects was sought in interviews with the parents. A small, stratified random sample was chosen from the total population of families to represent the distribution of boys and girls (i.e., 9 males and 6 females). The instrument was an interview schedule of 12 items, developed in direct reference to the Camp's goals, objectives and procedures. The interviews were conducted by two-person teams in the families' homes, seven months after the camp. The responses were content analyzed into general categories, either (a) endorsing the camp or reporting positive effects or (b) no positive effects.

The 1983 Home Interviews. The instrument for the 1983 Follow-Up study was revised considerably based on a review of the previous year's results and further references to the results of published studies. Previous studies have noted strong effects in the areas of increased independence, happiness, values orientation and general, overall improvement for camping programs for disadvantaged and delinquent youth. These factors became major considerations in restructuring the interview schedule.

In addition, the general comments of parents collected in the previous study tended to support the Camp's positive impact of the child and to identify certain areas of improvement, even though these did not emerge in the results from the structured items. Specifically; these dealt with increased maturity and independence. Therefore, the questions were constructed to cover more general areas of evaluation (e.g., camp as an overall experience, general positive changes in attitude). The items were presented as open-ended questions. The data collected were analyzed into categories of (a) endorsement or positive effect or (b) no endorsement or positive effect. Individual narrative responses were noted.

It was also noted that the parents seemed more comfortable with generalized measures of the camp's effectiveness than with identifying specific behaviors which would objectively and empirically demonstrate impact (e.g., improvements in table manners and completing chores). In part, it was suggested that parents saw the effectiveness of camp not in these terms but as promoting independence and maturity.

These interviews were conducted six weeks after Camp. A larger random sample was selected, stratified by age and sex (11 males and 8 females). (See Table 6)

Results. The results of both Post Card Surveys were highly positive in all areas (Table 7). The return rate for both surveys was over 40%. In contrast, the results of the 1982 Home Interviews were not very supportive. The only areas reported as being positively affected by a majority of parents were increased

willingness to try new things and increased initiative. The impression of the interviewers was that the parents' perceptions were not accurately described in the interview instrument.

The 1983 home visitations provided more extensive and positive results.

Major areas of positive impact reported were:

- continued interest in Camp activities,
- increased interest in nature,
- improved relations with friends,
- increased interest in group activities,
- increased problem solving ability,
- increased willingness to talk about personal feelings,
- increased maturity, and
- general positive change in attitude.

The differences between parental feedback in 1982 and 1983 were dramatic (Table 8). The 1983 parents reported positive impact in 34% of their responses. In the 1983 home visitations:

- 100% of the parents or guardians said Camp was a fun experience
- likewise, 100% indicated Camp was an overall good experience
- parents reported that their child's interest in Camp activities carried over to the home environment in 95% of the cases
- when all items regarding positive impact were totaled, 61% reported that the child had shown positive change in specified areas since Camp.

#### Implications

This research has considerable implications for camp directors and others concerned with the evaluation of camp services. Feedback from parents can be an important source of data to demonstrate the Camp's effectiveness. This feedback can be utilized in program development. Techniques for surveying parents need to be developed which will increase the collection of meaningful feedback. The comparison of techniques here provides guidelines for future evaluation efforts.

The Post Card Survey was an inexpensive and particularly effective method of collecting data. For a population which may not be expected to respond to mailed surveys, the return was relatively substantial. While it might be expected that the ratings would be high, the survey demonstrated to the parents the Camp's concern for its services and helped prepare parents for the interviews.

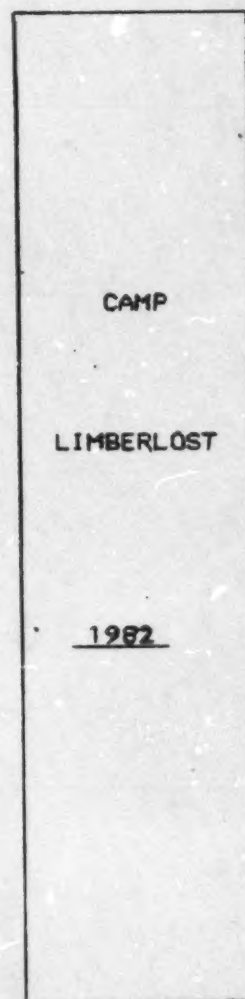
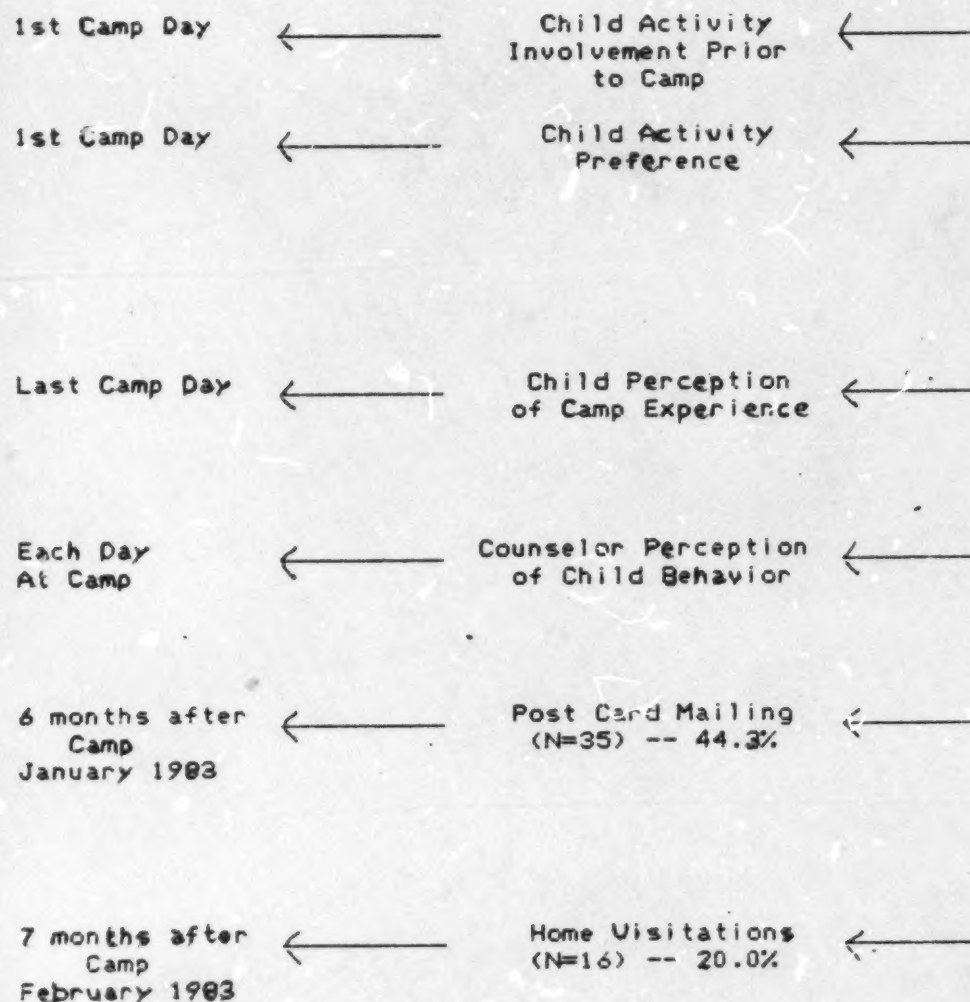
In the follow-up interviews, certain factors seemed to contribute to the increase in supportive, positive responses:

- for the 1983 Camp, the interviews were conducted 4 weeks rather than 7 months after Camp
- items were selected which appeared to be more consistent with the parents' perceptions of Camp impact (e.g., increased maturity, independence)
- items were presented as more generalized changes (e.g., more mature) rather than as specific behavior behaviors (e.g., table manners)
- sample size was increased, potentially resulting in a more accurate representation of population
- items identified in related research were included.

Additional recommendations would include: (1) the use of multiple sources for data in order to compare results; (2) collecting information on camper activity preferences to increase the Camp's responsiveness to their interests and, perhaps, their developmental needs; and (3) to plan interviews for brief periods (no more than 20 minutes).

## 1982 CAMP LIMBERLOST

## RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Chart 1DATA COLLECTEDRESEARCH ACTIVITY

1983 CAMP LIMBERLOST  
RESEARCH ACTIVITY  
Chart 2

DATA COLLECTED

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

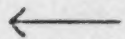
1 month  
After Camp  
September 1983



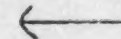
Post Card  
Mailing  
(N= 29) -- 43.0%



2 months  
After Camp  
October 1983



Home Visitations  
(N=19) -- 25.0%



CAMP

LIMBERLOST

1983

TABLE 1. CAMPERS BY SEX AND CAMP YEAR

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|        | <u>1982 Camp</u> | <u>1983 Camp</u> |
|--------|------------------|------------------|
| Male   | 49               | 43               |
| Female | 30               | 33               |
| Total  | <hr/> 79         | <hr/> 76         |

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TABLE 2: CAMPER ACTIVITY INVOLVEMENT PRIOR TO 1982 CAMP

| <u>Activity</u>  | <u>Percent<br/>Female Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Male Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Total Campers</u> |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Archery          | 40.0                              | 69.4                            | 58.2                             |
| Arts/Crafts      | 90.0                              | 81.6                            | 84.8                             |
| Boating/Canoeing | 73.3                              | 81.6                            | 78.5                             |
| Dance            | 66.7                              | 34.7                            | 46.8                             |
| Drama            | 63.3                              | 46.9                            | 53.2                             |
| Fishing          | 80.0                              | 89.8                            | 86.1                             |
| Gymnastics       | 66.7                              | 51.0                            | 57.0                             |
| Music            | 83.3                              | 53.1                            | 64.5                             |
| Nature           | 63.3                              | 59.2                            | 60.7                             |
| Riflery          | 36.7                              | 83.7                            | 65.8                             |
| Sports           | 90.0                              | 91.8                            | 91.1                             |
| Swimming         | 86.7                              | 89.8                            | 88.6                             |

**NOTE:** Campers were asked to identify the activities they had participated in prior to attending the 1982 Camp.

TABLE 3. CAMPER ACTIVITY PREFERENCE FOR 1982 CAMP

| <u>Activity</u>  | <u>Percent<br/>Female Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Male Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Total Campers</u> |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Archery          | 66.7                              | 89.8                            | 81.0                             |
| Arts/Crafts      | 83.3                              | 75.5                            | 78.5                             |
| Boating/Canoeing | 86.7                              | 95.9                            | 92.4                             |
| Dance            | 73.3                              | 30.6                            | 46.8                             |
| Drama            | 73.3                              | 32.6                            | 48.1                             |
| Fishing          | 80.0                              | 95.9                            | 89.9                             |
| Gymnastics       | 80.0                              | 57.1                            | 65.8                             |
| Music            | 53.3                              | 42.9                            | 46.8                             |
| Nature           | 80.0                              | 79.6                            | 79.7                             |
| Riflery          | 76.7                              | 95.9                            | 88.6                             |
| Sports           | 73.3                              | 93.9                            | 86.1                             |
| Swimming         | 86.7                              | 91.6                            | 93.7                             |

**NOTE:** Campers were asked to identify the activities they preferred to participate in during the 1982 Camp.

TABLE 4. CAMPER PERCEPTIONS OF 1982 CAMP GENERAL PROGRAM

| <u>Question</u>                                                  | <u>Percent<br/>Female Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Male Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Total Campers</u> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Campers interested<br>in attending outside<br>worship activity   | 83.3                              | 63.3                            | 70.9                             |
| Campers interested<br>in eating meals as<br>a group              | 100.0                             | 89.8                            | 93.7                             |
| Campers interested<br>in rest period to<br>play hard rest of day | 80.0                              | 71.4                            | 74.7                             |
| Campers interested<br>in free-time to<br>do what they wanted     | 100.0                             | 95.9                            | 97.5                             |

TABLE 5. CAMPER PERCEPTIONS OF 1982 CAMP EXPERIENCE

| <u>Criteria</u>                                         | <u>Percent<br/>Female Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Male Campers</u> | <u>Percent<br/>Total Campers</u> |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Having attended Camp Limberlost,<br>camper was feeling: |                                   |                                 |                                  |
| Happier                                                 | 86.7                              | 87.0                            | 86.8                             |
| More liked by friends                                   | 80.0                              | 73.9                            | 76.3                             |
| More helpful                                            | 70.0                              | 89.1                            | 81.6                             |
| More sharing with others                                | 96.7                              | 91.3                            | 93.4                             |
| More needed and wanted                                  | 60.0                              | 65.2                            | 63.2                             |
| Better about self                                       | 76.7                              | 78.3                            | 77.6                             |
| Like doing more by self                                 | 63.3                              | 69.6                            | 67.1                             |
| Friendlier to others                                    | 66.7                              | 91.2                            | 81.6                             |
| Camper was wanting/willing to:                          |                                   |                                 |                                  |
| Return to camp                                          | 80.0                              | 91.3                            | 86.8                             |
| Make new friends at home                                | 83.3                              | 82.6                            | 82.9                             |
| Learn new things in school                              | 96.7                              | 93.5                            | 94.7                             |
| Play more outside                                       | 66.7                              | 91.2                            | 81.6                             |
| Participate in different games                          | 90.0                              | 89.1                            | 89.5                             |
| Make arts/crafts in free time                           | 93.3                              | 84.8                            | 88.2                             |
| Take care of things living outdoors                     | 100.0                             | 95.7                            | 97.4                             |
| Help others with their work                             | 93.3                              | 93.5                            | 93.4                             |
| Eat daily balanced meals                                | 93.3                              | 89.1                            | 90.8                             |
| Think about self actions<br>prior to becoming upset     | 100.0                             | 91.2                            | 94.7                             |

TABLE 6. SUBJECTS OF 1983 FOLLOW-UP STUDY

| <u>Subject's Age</u> | <u>Number<br/>Female Subjects</u> | <u>Number<br/>Male Subjects</u> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 8 YEARS              | 2                                 | 3                               |
| 9 YEARS              | 4                                 | 4                               |
| 10 YEARS             | <u>2</u>                          | <u>4</u>                        |
| TOTAL                | 8                                 | 11                              |

A total of 19 subjects (25%) from the Camp population (76) were stratified and randomly selected by age and sex. The number of campers by age and sex were:

8 years (male = 11 and female = 8)  
 9 years (male = 16 and female = 17)  
 10 years (male = 14 and female = 8) (two over-aged males were excluded)

TABLE 7. PARENTAL FEEDBACK FROM 1982 AND 1983 POSTCARDS

| <u>Statement</u>                                                                  | # 1982 Camp<br>Mean Score | ** 1983 Camp<br>Mean Score |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1) Camp Limberlost was an overall positive experience.                            | 3.75                      | 3.72                       |
| 2) Child learned and experienced new activities at Camp Limberlost.               | 3.81                      | 3.72                       |
| 3) Camp Limberlost was a positive influence on relationships with others.         | 3.75                      | 3.69                       |
| 4) Camp Limberlost improved child's interest in animals and out-of-doors.         | 3.60                      | 3.52                       |
| 5) After attending Camp Limberlost, child talks frequently about camp experience. | 3.66                      | 3.48                       |
| 6) Child was more independent after attending Camp Limberlost                     | N/A                       | 3.64                       |

\*The 1982 survey population was 79; 35 (44.3%) postcards were returned.  
Evaluative Scale was: Strongly Agree (4); Agree (3); Disagree (2); and Strongly Disagree (1)

\*\*The 1983 survey population was 67; 29 (43.0%) postcards were returned.  
 Total Camp population was 76; however 9 campers resided in the same household. Only one mailing was sent per household.

Evaluative Scale was: Strongly Agree (4); Agree (3); Disagree (2); and Strongly Disagree (1)

N/A = This question was not asked in the 1982 postcard survey.

TABLE 8. REPORTS OF POSITIVE CAMP EFFECTS  
1982 AND 1983 CAMPS

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|                                           | <u>1982</u><br><u>Camp</u> | <u>1983</u><br><u>Camp</u> |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| % Responses Reporting<br>Positive Effects | 34%                        | 61%                        |
| % Responses Reporting<br>Neutral Effects  | <u>66%</u>                 | <u>39%</u>                 |
| TOTAL                                     | 100%                       | 100%                       |

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